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ABSTRACT

A summary of the first nine months of the study on "The Education of Adults in New York in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century," the report has further explored what public policies and programs might serve to increase the participation of adults in individualized learning activities by examining the issues of: (1) financing, (2) information, (3) counseling, (4) adult learning goals, and (5) the role of the media, particularly television. An approach to financing adult learning that has generated much interest has been a universal lifelong educational entitlement plan to guarantee access to education for individuals throughout their lives. Several State papers related to the concept are presently being considered at the national level. Other possibilities being explored are the opportunities available through private resources. Effective information dissemination appears to be through existing agencies. Additional study is needed to determine how augmented vocational/educational counseling services can be provided. Only preliminary probes have been made into the issues of adult learning goals and the role of educational television. Action plans include discussion at State/regional adult education conferences, continued participation in the national exploration of the entitlement concept, and increased publicity on the lifelong learning concept. (EA)

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TO: Persons Interested in Adult Education

FROM: Norman D. Kurland, Director - Study of Adult Education

SUBJECT: Study of Adult Education - Progress Report
(Study paper # 9)

I. Introduction

Last year Commissioner Nyquist, with the concurrence of the Board of Regents, initiated a study on "The Education of Adults in New York in the Last Quarter of the Twentieth Century." The Study began July 1, 1974.

The Commissioner initiated the study because of his awareness that the educational needs of adults are going to call for increasing attention in the years ahead. For one thing there are going to be more adults in our society than every before; they are going to be a large proportion of the total population; and they are going to live longer than any past generation. In addition, because of declining birth rates, educational institutions at all levels are taking a new look at the potential of adults as new clientele for education. SUNY now has a Provost for Lifelong Learning and CUNY has done a survey regarding its role in the education of adults.

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Apart from demographic considerations, the education of adults calls for attention because the conditions in our society in the next quarter century are going to make demands on people that will tax to the fullest their spiritual, intellectual and emotional resources. The challenges are by now familiar: developing values to sustain the nation in its next century; coping with the political, economic and social consequences of the energy crisis; responding to technological changes that will, among other things, require many persons to change jobs and careers several times. These are but some of the challenges adults will face - challenges that no amount of education during youth can adequately prepare any of us to face. How can adult education help meet these challenges? What must our educational institutions do? What changes in State programs and policies might be required? These are the questions the Commissioner wanted to have studied.

Because of the importance and potential impact of such a study, the Commissioner might have proposed the creation of a Study Commission with a large staff and budget, and given it two years in which to report. He decided instead to assign the study as the sole responsibility of a single long-time Department staff member with a staff consisting of a single assistant and a secretary; with a modest budget; and with an initial charge to work for a year to draw together existant studies and wisdom, and to assess and prescribe the essential next steps. This report summarizes what has been done in the nine months since the study began.

II. What We Have Learned

Since the start of the Study we have met with groups and individuals - several hundred in all - in the State and outside, who are involved in some aspect of adult education. We have read innumerable books, reports, articles and papers, beginning with the Report on Adult Education done as part of a Regents' inquiry into the "Character and Cost of Public Education in the State of New York". That report was done in 1938 and it anticipated much that is now being discussed.

The past concern with the education of adults developed in a period when education was considered to be primarily an activity appropriate for the young. In this context adult education was thought of largely as making up for something missed while young or an "extension" or "continuing" of education begun in youth. This helps explain why the education of adults was undertaken by institutions whose primary mission was the education of youth; and it explains also why in these institutions adult education had a relatively low priority. As a further reflection of the view that adult education was not a matter of high importance, little public money was provided for adult education, with the exception of modest funding of programs in Americanization, basic education, high school equivalency, and manpower training.

Yet in spite of these limitations, adult education flourished in many places. A rich array of offerings was made available in an evident response to the needs of adults. Dedicated professional adult educators put together exciting programs, often in the face of indifference from the administrations of the organizations in which they worked.

The result is that today in New York we have an extens've educational service for adults. The traditional "providers" - school districts; Boards of Cooperative Educational Services; two and four-year colleges; universities; trade; technical, business and correspondence schools - have all been expanding their offerings to adults. The mass media, particularly television, are one of the most potent educating forces in our society. Professional societies in such areas as law, medicine, accounting and engineering provide for or encourage the continuing professional education of their members - indeed, some are pressing to make this a mandatory requirement for relicensing. Many employers, including government agencies and the military, provide or pay for the education of employees. Trade associations such as the American Banking Institute have large-scale programs. It may be, that more education is conducted by business and industry than by all of the other educating agencies combined. Labor unions have negotiated employee education benefits. The Cooperative Extension Service, with its network of field agents, provides an array of services to adults. Community organizations such as churches, Y's, Kiwanis, and the League of Women Voters, are additional sources. And, of course, the Education Department's Adult Basic Education, Proficiency Examination, External Degree and Library Independent Learner Programs are significant examples of its responsiveness.

The result is that there seems to be hardly a subject that someone is not studying -from acupuncture to zoology- or a setting which is not being used as a learning environment - from living room to commuter train - from classes offered before the work day begins to extended

periods of on-campus study. People study to gain basic skills, to prepare for jobs or to get better jobs, and to earn credentials; they study for the sheer pleasure of learning and for such practical purposes as learning to repair their own cars or TV sets. Some people seem to spend every spare moment in study, others spend only a few hours a year in an organized learning activity; but there are apparently very few people who do not spend some time each year in planned learning activities - either self-directed or in courses.

Regional Projects funded by the Department with Higher Education Act Title I funds have been collecting valuable information on who is providing what to whom. They are also surveying both participants and non-participants to determine their needs and interests.

These and other surveys demonstrate that, in spite of the extensive number of programs available to adults, there are large numbers of adults who are not very well reached by the present adult education efforts - generally these are less educated, lower income, older, often unemployed, and disproportionately from minority groups. A recent report of the National Advisory Council on Adult Education, A Target Population in Adult Education, is only the most recent effort to make a forceful case for the relationship between low levels of school attainment and such other factors as high unemployment rates, low lifetime earnings, and lower occupational levels.

According to the 1970 census of the New York State population twenty-five years and older, 47 percent or nearly five million persons had less than high school completion. Of these, nearly 250,000 had

no schooling. While many of these people are older, under present secondary school holding rates, approximately two million people will reach 25 years of age in the next 25 years without having completed high school. Added to this will be whatever migrants come into the State with less than high school completion.

Nothing that we have seen to date suggests that there will be significant reductions in the numbers of individuals with less than adequate levels of schooling without considerably greater efforts than those now under way. Yet in the next 25 years low levels of educational attainment will be an even greater personal, economic and social disability than in the past.

As a further indication of need, a 1972 survey by the Commission on Non-Traditional Studies indicated that nationally three-fourths of the population ages 18-60 would like to be learners and about 30% actually are. If these percentages hold for New York State, there are 6.75 million would-be adult learners and 2.7 million actual participants. Among the major reasons given for non-participation by would-be learners are cost, time, unwillingness to go full-time to school, home and job responsibilities, and lack of information and counseling.

This concern for non-participants in adult education is one of the reasons for the current examination of public policy in this area.

There is also a second reason for the considerable welling up of interest in the education of adults in the last few years. Hardly a week now goes by without a new book or study coming to us, usually with the word "lifelong" in the title. This current interest builds upon a long tradition of adult education, but it is looking at adult education from some new perspectives, perhaps best typified by the substitution of "lifelong" for "adult" as the adjective.

This perspective grows out of the recognition that adults have learning needs that are not the same as those of the young and that people learn throughout their lives, from the first moments of life until death. While much, perhaps most, learning takes place without formal instruction, learning at every age, not just from 6 to 22, can be facilitated by the provision of learning opportunities, including appropriate instruction. Coupled with this recognition is a growing body of research on adult development that suggests that adults do more than just grow older - they go through distinct developmental stages, each of which has an influence on learning needs and capabilities.

What this means in concrete terms is that, just as you don't teach teen-agers the same things in the same way as you do elementary school children, so you don't teach the middle aged the same things in the same way as you do college age youth. Providing for the learning needs of adults, then, is an activity with its own requirements and with an importance in its own right. It is not done best by persons or institutions whose primary concern and experience is with the education of the young.

Thus, while we have many adults participating in educational activities, they do so largely in institutions whose primary concerns are not with adults. What now appears to be emerging in response to a growing need are educational institutions and programs that are for adults or in which the education of adults is at least on a par with the other missions of the institution.

This development also rests on the conviction that continued access to learning opportunities is going to be essential for most adults to help them adjust to changing work requirements, to cope with a rapidly changing world, or to enrich their lives both during working years and during the long years after retirement. If education is an important need of most adults, then the issue of equality of opportunity arises here and this makes adult education a matter of public policy concern, if nothing else does.

We were led, therefore, to ask about the barriers to participation in education of adults who want and need education; or, to put it positively, what public policies and programs might serve to increase the participation of adults in learning activities most appropriate to their individual needs?

We began the examination of these questions in our Interim Report issued last December. There we identified five issues to be addressed: 1) Financing, 2) Information, 3) Counseling, 4) Adult Learning Goals and 5) The Role of the Media, particularly Television.

It should come as no surprise that the first matter that should be raised was financing. Early in the Study we began to notice that there was an approach to financing adult learning that was coming

to be known as "entitlement". It involves giving to all eligible individuals an "entitlement" to a certain amount of education either in terms of time or dollars to be taken at times of an individual's own choosing from any of a broad range of eligible providers. If every adult has an entitlement and may use it for any approved educational activity, and if unused entitlement remains available to the individual throughout his life, then it becomes a basis for financing lifelong education.

Such an approach to financing education through the student is already familiar to all of us in the G.I. Bill. In recent years Congress has been moving more toward a student based system for financing higher education. Last month President Wharton of Michigan State University gave a major address at the annual conference of the American Association for Higher Education advocating an entitlement for postsecondary education. A poll of the membership of that same organization showed that 49 percent were in favor of channeling financial aid directly to students - and that from persons two-thirds of whom were administrators and the rest faculty of higher institutions!

Because of the interest in the entitlement concept, Commissioner Nyquist encouraged us to explore the idea in depth. This we have done with people both in New York State and outside, particularly in Washington. The results are reflected in several papers, one of which is at this moment the subject of study by a committee convened by the U.S. Office of Education to advise it on future policy for lifelong education. The latest paper was done in conjunction with

a policy analysis of the entitlement concept being conducted by the National Institute of Education.

One of the major questions raised in connection with the entitlement, or any proposal for public financing of adult education, is why there should be any such financing. Are not most adults able to pay for the education they want and shouldn't they be expected to do so?

We have attempted to answer this question by providing a rationale for public support of the education of adults in another paper in which we also describe various ways to provide such support, including the entitlement.

The basic elements of the rationale are arguments based on equity and on what we have come to call an "age-neutral" education policy. Present educational financing is oriented toward the young. If there is a case for the importance of education at all ages, as we have briefly tried to suggest here, then there is a case for leaving to the individual the decision as to when he or she will take any public subsidy for education.

During our explorations we became aware that many adults who now participate in education have all or part of their expenses paid by their employers. Although many companies provide tuition assistance as an employee benefit and some unions have won such benefits through negotiations, we also found that the utilization rates of these benefits is very low - nationally around four percent!

The benefits available to UAW members alone are estimated to be worth potentially $200,000,000 a year but only some $2,000,000 is being used.

We are exploring the reasons for this situation and expect that we shall find an opportunity here for a State effort to capitalize on this rich vein of private resources. Both State and City Universities, for example, have already worked out an arrangement with the New York Telephone Company. There should be ways to stimulate other similar arrangements.

However, we can expect that, as the utilization rates of company programs go up, the pressures will increase for spreading the support through some form of public funding.

After financing, we found a concern with two closely related matters, information and counseling. Even where there is a rich array of offerings for adults, it is usually difficult for anyone to find out about all of the possibilities that might meet his needs. A better information system could increase the use of present resources as well as help institutions identify unmet needs.

In addition, many adults are not sure just what their learning needs are or where they might best go to get help. A number of efforts have been undertaken in recent years to meet this need, including the Syracuse Regional Learning Service initiated by former Regent Stephen Bailey, the Adult Independent Learner Project, a national effort in which our State Library System is heavily involved, and the External Degree's volunteer counseling program.

We examined the issues involved in providing information and counseling services to adults in another paper. It served as the basis for a small workshop convened by us last week out of which came the following major observations and recommendations:

There was strong affirmation of the need by adults and by agencies serving adults for current, easily available information on all forms of educational opportunities and community services.

There was equally strong affirmation that simply collecting information was not enough. It has to be kept current, it must be available in convenient locations, and there must be trained individuals available to help people use the information. This is particularly true for those who are not regular participants in education. Institutions should be encouraged to make special outreach efforts to such populations. Making such information available, it was urged, would do more immediately to increase the utilization of existing resources and increase participation than any other single step that might be taken.

With modest funding, probably much of it currently available in various programs, regional resource collection information services could be supported. The information should be made available in an inexpensive format largely through existing agencies such as schools, BOCES, colleges and public libraries.

The group also noted the need for augmented counseling services to help individuals who need more than information in order to make decisions about their own career and educational plans.

However, it is not yet clear how these services can be provided on the required scale at a cost that can be supported. It was urged that the experience of institutionally based projects like the various adult counseling centers in school districts, BOCES, community colleges and colleges be compared with such "free-standing" community-based services as the Syracuse Regional Learning Service and with services provided by public libraries. The State should be prepared at some point to make an increased investment in educational and career counseling services for adults but it should do so on a basis that will insure that quality services can be provided.

We shall be examining these and other suggestions that came from the workshop and, in collaboration with other units in the Department, develop specific proposals for action.

Integrally entwined in every discussion of financing, information and counseling are such issues as eligibility, approval authority and procedures, credentialing, quality control, consumer protection, staff competencies, and coordination among all of the agencies involved. Although we can just mention these issues here, each of them is going to be of critical concern as opportunities for lifelong education expand in number and variety. Each of them will require decisions by the Board of Regents and some may require legislation. There will be recommendations for consideration from us and others in the Department.

In our Interim Report we identifed two other areas that the Commissioner thought should be giver attention. The first of these is an area that we called "Adult Learning Goals". We have only thus far been able to begin initial probes into this subject, but already we have exposed a fascinating body of work on adult development that promises in the future to help greatly in understanding how best to meet the learning needs of adults. The implications for retirement and the years immediately preceding it may have profound significance for the quality of life of that growing segment of our population, as well as showing us how to tap a sadly neglected source of human and economic potential.

Embeded in the concern for adult learning goals is the issue of the educational requirements for the relicensing of professionals, a matter that is under study by another unit of the Department.

The final issue that we identified for attention is the "Role of Media, Particularly Television" in the education of adults. Any comprehensive examination of education for the future must take into account the powerful actual and potential influence of the media, including both public and commerical television. Just what the roles of public educational authorities in this area should be and how they should exercise those roles are other matters on which we plan to develop recommendations.

III. What Next?

One remark in our Interim Report that strikes a responsive chord in nearly all who comment on it, is our observation that "what is not needed is just another study with yet another set of recommendations; what is needed is a program for action." We based this comment on our finding that there are available today a half dozen or more studies, including those by the Carnegie Commission and the Commission on Non-Traditional Studies, all of which discuss more or less adequately needs, problems and possible solutions. All end with very sensible lists of recommendations, which if implemented, would undoubtedly improve the quality and accessibility of education for adults. We, therefore, have to ask whether yet another Commission and another study report is needed, or has the time come to decide which among all the proposals now on the table should be implemented? The people in the field say with some considerable degree of urgency that the time for action is here. We believe they are correct. The needs are largely known. The challenge is to identify a few proposals for action that have a reasonable chance of being implemented and which, if implemented effectively, would lead to other desirable outcomes. The entitlement concept is of this nature as are the recommendations on information and counseling services.

We now plan to test these recommendations with a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations concerned in varying ways with the education of adults. Most immediately we will be doing so in May at the annual conference of the New York Association for Continuing

Education. In the Fall we are planning a series of regional meetings around the State to get inputs from as many people as possible. Our purposes in these meetings will be to gain ideas for strengthening the proposals and to gain indications of the support they might have or the opposition that might be expected. We also expect to hear of concerns that we may not have addressed that may also call for priority attention at the State level.

We shall also continue to participate in the national exploration of the entitlement concept.

Out of all of this we hope to come up with recommendations for actions -

o Some that might be undertaken by units of the Department within the authority they now have.

o Some that might be undertaken by the Department with the Regents' approval

o Some that might become part of the Regents' State legislative program for 1976 and beyond.

o Some that the Regents might support for action at the Federal level.

o Some that might be submitted for support to Federal grant programs or to foundations.

We also hope that our work will be helpful to the Regents, the Commissioner and the Department in reacting to the recommendations of others. For of one thing all can be certain, ours will be neither the only or the last proposals in this area.

One activity that can be undertaken immediately is the publicizing of the concept of lifelong learning and the educational resources in each community that are available to support it. Such an effort would have immediate value for many unemployed persons who may not be aware of all of the educational opportunities, many free or low cost, that may be helpful to them in this time of stress.

We need to address our effort also to school and college teachers and administrators, many of whom have not accepted the fact that adults have a legitimate claim to their attention and resources. They and all of us also need to hear from the people who now work with adults about the excitment, the challenge and the rewards of working with mature learners. Our contact with these people has given us confidence that we have the foundation to create in New York State services in support of lifelong learning for all the people of the State. We have an instrumentality unequaled in any other State - the University of the State of New York. It is almost as though this institution were created for the purpose of lifelong education. The development of the External Degree is only the beginning of the realization of that vast potential that lies in the configuration of institutions and resources that is under the jurisdiction of the Board of Regents. It is our hope that this study can contribute to the realization of that potential.